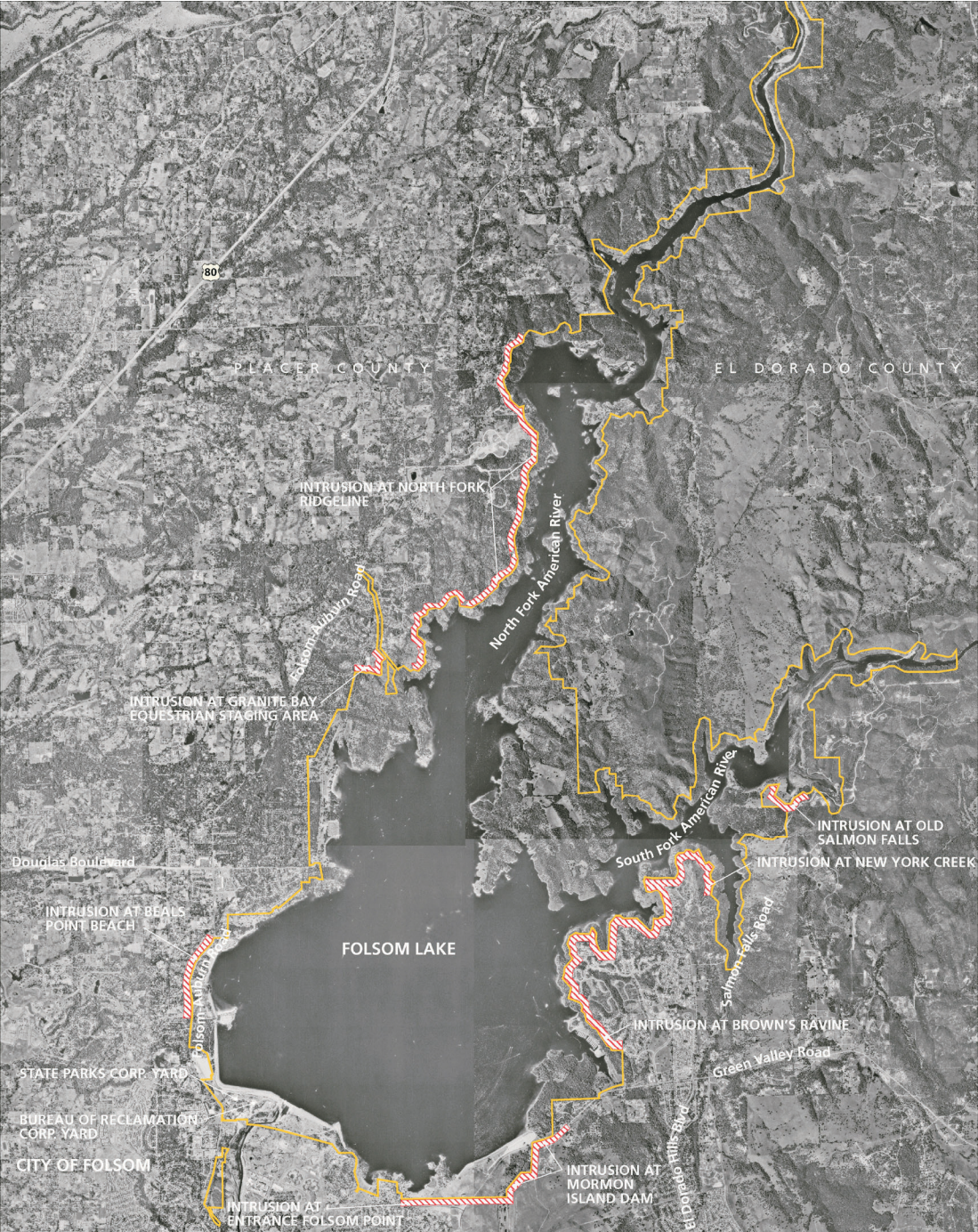


FOLSOM LAKE STATE  
RECREATION AREA  
RESOURCE INVENTORY

 Visual Intrusion  
from Development

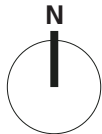


FIGURE

**SR-3**

**Elements Detracting  
from Scenic Resources  
and Visual Quality on  
on Folsom Lake**

Prepared by  
Wallace Roberts & Todd



Not to Scale

### Parking Lots

The combination of large numbers of vehicles with large trailers requires the provision of substantial areas of parking. However, more than any other park facility, the large unbroken parking lots at the key day-use facilities tend to degrade the visual quality of these recreation areas. For instance, the main beach parking area at Granite Bay, nearly 5 acres in size, includes no internal or perimeter planting (Photo SR-15). Further, no planting exists at Folsom Point where the ramp parking lot measures almost 7 acres. The same situation exists at the 5-acre Negro Bar boat ramp parking lot (Photo SR-16). While the Granite Bay main boat launch parking area (6 acres) is broken up by internal planting above the high waterline, it is widely distributed and provides little visual relief (Photo SR-17). Similarly, the parking area at the Folsom Dam Observation Point is a huge area of asphalt immediately adjacent to the public roadway, in the foreground of views of the lake by passing motorists. Although the issue of parking capacity in the Unit is a significant one, their implication for the visual experience of the Unit user must be considered.

### Utilities

There are several locations within the Unit where utility lines interrupt the scenic landscape and reduce the quality of views from significant vista points. The main utility through the Unit is the Western Area Power Administration high-tension electrical transmission line between the Nimbus Dam substation to the Folsom Dam substation. The corridor right-of-way is 150 feet wide. The line extends from Nimbus Dam north along the western shoreline of Lake Natoma to Mississippi Bar.<sup>7</sup> The line crosses Lake Natoma at the bend near Willow Creek and follows the eastern shoreline to a point just south of the Lake Natoma Crossing. The line crosses the lake once more and follows the western shoreline along the American River Gorge to Folsom Dam.<sup>8</sup> Clearly visible from several vantage points in the Mississippi Bar and Negro Bar areas, the towers and overhead lines are significant foreground features when viewed from Lake Natoma and the Lake Overlook (Figures 18). A municipal electrical utility line passes through the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park along the eastern shore of Lake Natoma (Photo SR-19). Despite the history of the Folsom Powerhouse, this utility line is not related to the facility and significantly reduces the quality of views of the Powerhouse buildings and detracts from their historic quality. Various utility structures and appurtenances are associated with electrical power generation at both Folsom and Nimbus dams. In addition, a 42-inch pipeline carrying water from Folsom Lake to the Folsom Prison and the City of Folsom runs from the base of Folsom Dam.<sup>9</sup>

### Other Structures and Activities

Three corporation yards exist within the Unit and significantly impact key views. Both the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) yards located on Folsom Dam Road are poorly screened from the roadway and lend an industrial feel to the area. This stretch of roadway between the intersection with Auburn-Folsom Road and the Folsom Dam is a major Unit gateway and includes a Park monument

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<sup>7</sup> Western Area Power Administration, *Draft Environmental Assessment for Right-of-Way Maintenance in the Sacramento Valley, California*, May 2002, pg. 3-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 3-3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

sign, manicured lawns, and ornamental planting. The third yard is a BOR facility located on the western shore of Lake Natoma below the Lake Overlook (Photo SR-18). As with the high-tension electrical transmission line described above, the yard is a significant feature in the foreground view of Lake Natoma from Lake Overlook. Further, the yard is clearly visible from the eastern shore at Nimbus Flat.

Additional activities that adversely affect visual quality within the Unit include the use of temporary storage facilities by concessionaires and security fencing in specified areas. The storage facilities, 20-foot long white metal transportation containers, are used to store boating equipment at the Negro Bar beach, Granite Bay main beach and boat launch, and the Willow Creek day use area (Figures 20-22). These containers sit awkwardly on the park landscape, sharply contrasting with the natural character of their setting. Due to the importance and sensitive nature of the dams, security fencing is necessary in several key areas, particularly areas where the public would otherwise have access. However, this fencing is often in various levels of disrepair and reduces visual quality from many vantages within the Unit. One example of security issues impacting the scenic resources of the Unit is from the Lake Overlook. From this point, an old chain-link fence interrupts southern views and a guardrail intended to restrict off-road vehicle access does little to improve views out from the overlook (Photo SR-23).

### Exposed Shoreline of Folsom Lake

Seasonal fluctuation in water levels results in considerable impact on the visual quality of Folsom Lake. The highest elevations occur in late winter or early spring when storm and snowmelt runoff fill the reservoir; the lowest in late fall or early winter following the dry season. As a result, the elevations drop continuously—up to about 70 feet in normal years—from the start of the peak recreation season around Memorial Day through the season's end at Labor Day. Unlike bodies of water under tidal influence or natural riparian corridors as found upstream in the South and North Forks of the American River, Folsom Lake does not have the advantage of habitats that can adapt to such large changes in environmental condition. This leaves much of the exposed shoreline devoid of vegetation. The relatively gradual slope to the lake bottom results in a greater area of exposed shoreline with lower water levels, resulting in the “bathtub ring” effect common to California reservoirs. As Folsom Lake shrinks over the course of the recreation season, so does the quality of the views along its 75-miles of shoreline (Figures 24-26). This condition is further exacerbated by visitors who drive their vehicles out onto the exposed slopes, causing rutting and erosion of the exposed areas. In some years, this condition is mitigated by a striking display of wildflowers along shorelines with a particular aspect, including along the eastern shoreline between New York Creek and Old Salmon Falls.

### External Views

Public views of the Unit from external viewpoints are limited due to the topography of the area, the heavy vegetation within the Unit boundaries, and the nature of land ownership around the Unit. Views from private property, particularly of Folsom Lake, are impressive as reflected by the high-end residential estate development occurring around that lake. In El Dorado County, this style of development commands the hills along the majority of the eastern boundary of Folsom Lake to Salmon Falls. As this development extends from Salmon Falls Road north of Green Valley Road, property size increases dramatically as Folsom Lake views become a major selling factor. Along the western boundary of Folsom Lake in Placer



County, most of the choice properties with lake views have been developed. In addition, several exclusive gated subdivisions currently exist on the ridge above the Lake. As a result, few clear public access points exist from which to view Folsom Lake. This situation also applies to Lake Natoma, where the lands abutting the Unit boundary that afford the best vantage points are existing residential neighborhoods with little public access.

### **Views from Area Roadways**

Local roadways that pass through the Unit afford the best public views from external locations. These public views are distinctive since the only way to pass through the Unit is by one of five crossings. The five crossings serve as important gateways to the Unit and provide views of high quality. The visual experience at each crossing is as different as the views they provide; the visual experience also depends on a number of other important factors, such as travel direction, travel speed, and roadway elevation. In the case of the latter, the elevation provided by the bridge crossings results in ideal vantages. It should be noted that, with the exception of the crossing at Folsom Dam, all crossings accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic which allows for more leisurely enjoyment of the views.

The Hazel Avenue crossing of the American River south of the Nimbus Dam has the highest capacity and travel speed. Here the northbound views are of higher quality than they are southbound. As one travels north across the bridge, the urban landscape of the Highway 50/Hazel Avenue interchange falls behind as the bluff upon which the Lake Overlook lies looms ahead. The oak-studded bluff is in sharp contrast to the urban-developed plain to the south. Looking east, one can clearly see Nimbus Dam in the foreground, the length of Lake Natoma in the mid-ground and in the far distance the foothills of the Sierra. Although the travel speed on this bridge is fairly high, the bridge is long and provides the opportunity to experience the sweeping views.

Lake Natoma Crossing in Folsom connects Folsom Boulevard on the eastern shore with Auburn-Folsom Boulevard on the western shore. The travel speed, crossing angle, and length of the bridge provide an opportunity to observe the green shorelines of Lake Natoma to the west and the Rainbow Bridge and Historic Truss Bridge to the east. However, view quality in this area depends on the direction of travel. The Rainbow Bridge, located just east of the Lake Natoma Crossing, is the shortest of all the vehicle crossings. Despite this, the travel speed is low with high quality views of the new Lake Natoma Crossing and the lake to the west. High quality views also exist to the east of the Historic Truss Bridge with the American River gorge dropping from Folsom Dam in the immediate foreground with Lake Natoma beyond. Eastbound travelers can catch a glimpse of historic downtown Folsom as well as the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park. The fourth crossing, the Historic Truss Bridge, provided the first crossing of the American River in Folsom and now serves as a pedestrian and bicycle bridge. While this crossing provides the best views of the river gorge to the east, the western views of Lake Natoma are partially blocked by the Rainbow Bridge.

The fifth crossing of the Unit is located on the Folsom Dam at the southern limit of Folsom Lake. This low-speed two-lane crossing is more than 1,500 feet long and provides sweeping views of Folsom Lake to the east and of the rugged spillway and the City of Folsom to the west. No pedestrian or bicycle access is provided at this crossing with no stopping along the roadway permitted. In addition, Observation Point at the eastern end of Folsom Dam has been closed for security reasons since September 11, 2001. As a result, the only means of enjoying the views provided from this vantage is by automobile. It is important to note that



the dam road will be closed during construction of the dam raising project. This project is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2005 or 2006 and will not reopen to public travel once the project is complete. A replacement crossing is planned just west of the dam.

### **Threats to Scenic Resources**

The primary threat to scenic resources is from development that is rapidly closing in on the Unit on several fronts. Future development will likely come in the form of estate residential subdivisions on the hillsides above Folsom Lake along the Unit boundary. This threat seems more immediate in unincorporated El Dorado County where several residential estate subdivisions have been approved and new homes that back directly onto Unit lands continue to appear (Photo SR-27). Unfortunately, it is difficult to influence this type of activity outside of the Unit through a State Parks General Plan. With the exception of Granite Bay and the peninsula area, the State owns only a narrow strip of land along the shoreline above the high water mark. As a result, it is difficult to buffer the Unit from surrounding development and screen external views. Furthermore, the topography is such that the State would have to acquire lands between the Unit boundary and the top of surrounding ridgelines in order to protect views from the Unit. Figure SR-5 identifies these land areas on Folsom Lake. Areas for priority acquisition would be the lands not currently developed or approved for development.

Figure SR-5 also shows that the area of the Unit most at risk to this type of development is the peninsula between the two forks of the American River. The peninsula, characterized by rolling hills, open grasslands, and scattered oak and pine groves, represents the largest natural and untouched portion of the Unit (Photo SR-28). Furthermore, the peninsula is the most visible land area from Folsom Lake and its western shore. As residential subdivision development continues to push east along Salmon Falls Road, there is the potential over time for lands currently zoned agricultural to be rezoned as residential, particularly in the peninsula area. If this development were to occur on hillsides and ridgelines visible from within the Unit, then the rugged and untouched character of this area would be lost.

Due to these factors, land acquisition here should be of high priority for the State. Additionally, the State should consider acquiring the western shoreline along the North Fork of the American River in Placer County opposite the peninsula where the topographic conditions are similar. The State is currently considering the purchase of two major parcels totaling almost 1,000 acres adjacent to the existing Unit lands on the peninsula.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the most pristine and rugged natural landscapes within the Unit may be preserved, as will the contribution of these landscapes to a high quality visual resource.

### **Scenic Resource Issues**

This section summarizes the current issues related to the scenic resources of the Unit.

- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit along western shoreline of Folsom Lake, including at Beals Point beach, Granite Bay equestrian staging area, and above North Fork of the American River between North Granite and Horseshoe Bar;

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<sup>10</sup> State Parks staff, Personal communication, July 2003.

Figure SR-5: Threats to Scenic Resources in the Unit (This figure to be provided at the completion of GIS analysis)

- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit along western shoreline of Folsom Lake, including at Beals Point beach, Granite Bay equestrian staging area, and above North Fork of the American River between North Granite and Horseshoe Bar;
- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit along eastern shoreline of Folsom Lake, including at Old Salmon Falls, New York Creek, Brown's Ravine, Folsom Point entrance, and Mormon Island Wetland Preserve;
- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit on Lake Natoma at equestrian staging area at Lake Overlook and in the area of the office park at Blue Ravine Road;
- Lack of screening of the South Folsom Canal and Caltrans park-and-ride lot that abut the entrance drive to Nimbus Flat;
- Large parking areas without internal or perimeter landscaping detracts from the visual quality of several recreation areas, including at Granite Bay main beach, Folsom Point boat launch, Negro Bar boat launch, Observation Point, Lake Overlook, etc.;
- Interruption of scenic landscape by utility lines and structures, including: Western Area Power Administration high-tension electrical transmission corridor along western shore of Lake Natoma; municipal electrical utility line through Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park; structures and appurtenances associated with electrical power generation at Folsom and Nimbus dams; and 42-inch pipeline carrying water from Folsom Lake to the Folsom Prison and the City of Folsom;
- Unscreened corporation yards impact key views, including the State Parks and Bureau of Reclamation yards located on Folsom Dam Road, and the Bureau yard on the western shore of Lake Natoma below the Lake Overlook;
- Use of temporary metal storage containers by boat equipment concessionaires at several locations, including at Negro Bar beach, Granite Bay main beach boat launch, and Willow Creek.
- Security fencing associated with dam operation areas and corporation yards is unscreened and in levels of disrepair and reduces visual quality from many vantages within the Unit;
- "Bathtub ring" effect of exposed shoreline at low water levels on Folsom Lake significantly affects the visual quality of the reservoir;
- Primary threat to scenic resources continues to be from development closing in on the Unit on several fronts, particularly at Folsom Lake;
- The hillsides and ridgelines of the peninsula in El Dorado County and the western shoreline along the North Fork of the American River in Placer County that are visible from within the Unit are most at risk to visual intrusion from future development; and
- Topography and existing State ownership of land make it difficult to buffer the Unit from surrounding development and screen external views.





Photo SR-1: Panoramic views of Lake Natoma and Sierra Foothills from Lake Overlook.



Photo SR-2: The peninsula area from Folsom Lake displays untouched oak-studded rolling hills.





Photo SR-3: Natoma Bluffs – a significant landscape feature in the Unit.



Photo SR-4: Dredger tailings reflect a unique cultural landscape along the shores of Lake Natoma.





Photo SR-5: Rainbow Bridge with Historic Truss Bridge behind as viewed from Rainbow Rocks.



Photo SR-6: Lake Natoma Crossing mimics the design elements of the earlier Rainbow Bridge.





Photo SR-7: Residential development adjacent to the Granite Bay horse assembly area.



Photo SR-8: Residences on the hills above Hobie Cove at Brown's Ravine.





Photo SR-9: Adjacent residences at the remote Old Salmon Falls lower parking area.



Photo SR-10: Residential development off Green Valley Road as seen from Mormon Island Dam.





Photo SR-11: Gateway to Folsom Point – a missed opportunity to buffer the Unit from development.



Photo SR-12: South Folsom Canal on north side of Nimbus Flat gateway.





Photo SR-13: Caltrans park and ride lot on south side of Nimbus Flat gateway.



Photo SR-14: Residential development adjacent to the horse assembly area at Nimbus Dam Overlook.





Photo SR-15: Granite Bay main beach parking area – 5 acres of asphalt paving.



Photo SR-16: Negro Bar boat launch parking area – 5 more acres of asphalt paving.





Photo SR-17: Planting at Granite Bay boat launch parking area provides little relief.



Photo SR-18: Corporation yard and high tension electrical transmission line at Nimbus Dam affect key views from the southern end of Lake Natoma.





Photo SR-19: An electrical utility line corridor passes through the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park.



Photo SR-20: Storage container at Negro Bar beach area.





Photo SR-21: Storage containers at Granite Bay beach.



Photo SR-22: Storage containers at Willow Creek.





Photo SR-23: Southern views from Lake Overlook.



Photo SR-24: Seasonal low water elevations expose Folsom Lake's extensive shoreline area.





Photo SR-25: Exposed shoreline at Beals Point.



Photo SR-26: Folsom Lake recedes from this Granite Bay boat launch area.





Photo SR-27: Lake-view residential estate subdivisions in El Dorado County.



Photo SR-28: The most significant threat to the Unit's scenic resources.



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